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Women Speak Out in a Nuclear World

The Majority That's No Longer Silent

By BEVERLY BEYETTE, *Times Staff Writer*

"We sit here," the speaker said, "30 minutes away from some missile in the middle of Siberia—targeted on Los Angeles, I'm sure.

It was not a frame from "Dr. Strangelove, Part II." It was the first Los Angeles Women's Conference on National Security. And the speaker, William E. Colby, director of the Central Intelligence Agency from 1973 to 1976, was addressing the question: "Can We Trust the Russians?"

Boosting Participation

The conference Friday and Saturday at UCLA was a 12-hour, $40 crash course in Soviet-American relations, arms control strategies, the pros and cons of "Star Wars," the economics of defense and the specter of nuclear proliferation.

The stated objective of the sponsoring Committee for National Security, a Washington-based private nonpartisan, nonprofit group, was "to educate a broad spectrum of women about national security issues and to encourage them to participate knowledgeably in . . . decision-making processes."

CNS director Anne Cahn is on record as favoring "a mutual moratorium on the further testing of nuclear weapons" and it appeared that many at this regional forum, which had its peak attendance of 250 at Friday's opening session, were in sympathy with a freeze philosophy.

Why a women's conference on national security? One reason, Cahn said, is that it is an area of policy-making from which women have traditionally been excluded. Another is the special viewpoint that women bring to debate on the issue—for example, re-examining national security in the context of how arms buildup affects social and economic conditions.

It was a somewhat fragmented forum, offering a glut, or what one speaker referred to as a "cumulative overlap," of statistics on guns and butter, megatonnage potential of state-of-the-art nuclear warheads, the Gorbachev mind-set and prospects for the arms control negotiations under way in Geneva.

(It is significant, perhaps, that the principal conference speakers were men and that only one person, a questioner in the audience, mentioned that none of the U.S. negotiators at the table in Geneva are women.)

When the last speech had been presented, Lynn Greenberg of the Thursday Night Group, a Santa Monica-based nuclear education organization, told conferees, most of them women, "This is your chance to stop listening to experts and to become one yourself." Her appeal for ideas for constructive action brought responses ranging from a women's mission to Moscow to talk with Russian women, to formation of study groups on Russian history, culture and politics.

'Scared . . . or Relieved'

But, bombarded with conflicting information, many of the women seemed to be thinking what Ruth-Ann Mead of Brentwood, a bookkeeper for a television production company, later expressed: "I don't know who to believe on what subject. . . . I don't know whether to be more scared or more relieved."

A prevailing theme was the importance of citizen participation in decision-making. It is vital, said Cahn, that the collective wisdom be "the rudder" of U.S. policy.

Cahn poured a single pebble from a tennis ball can into a saucepan, explaining that the ping represented the total megatonnage of all bombs dropped during World War II. Then, pouring a canful of pebbles into the pan with a great clatter, she said that is what is available today.

Said Cahn: "We, you and I, have to ask what is it all about? What is it all for? We have tolerated and endured. Now we need to confront and to change."

Keynoter Paul C. Warnke, chairman of the Committee for National Security, former director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and in 1977-78 chief U.S. negotiator at the SALT arms control talks, said:

"I don't believe that (citizen input) is either a sign of weakness . . . , nor is it necessarily a formula for anarchy. I think instead that informed public debate, public participation in policy-making, creates more coherence. It tends to blunt the extremes."

Warnke emphasized that he was not suggesting that the public take part in the day-to-day, nuts-and-bolts decisions, explaining, "I don't think (for example) that most Americans really feel that they have the information to determine whether or not we ought to stay in UNESCO. I think most Americans couldn't tell UNESCO from UNICEF or Uniroyal or Unisex."

Issues of Survival

But, Warnke said, "The issues that should engage public attention are the key issues of the use of U.S. military force and the question of strategic arms policy. These are basically the issues that have to do with peace, with survival."

Warnke added: "The sorry history of the MX (missile) certainly provides no confidence that we can rely on the expert judgment of those who from time to time are in the positions of power."

The "Star Wars" (Strategic Defense Initiative) debate did not have, as had been promised by moderator Dan Caldwell of Pepperdine University, the pyrotechnic punch of the film, but it was not without its moments.

Thomas Etzold, assistant director for multilateral affairs in the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and, as he pointed out, the only political-level representative of the Reagan Administration among the speakers, called the "Star Wars" controversy "a mixture of good physics and ill will . . . of extraordinary proportions."

In the long run, Etzold said, "I think the President's Strategic Defense Initiative is going to seem conservative, in the most proper sense," in that it conserves deterrence as a basis for security and emphasizes increased reliance on defense and decreased reliance on nuclear offense.

At the very least, he added, the proposal provided the impetus for the Soviets to return to negotiations on real reductions in both strategic- and intermediate-range

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